

**"Sweden and the World
at the Dawn of 2012"
Report of a Listening Post held
in January in Stockholm**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. In the work of distinguishing themes in the given narratives, which was carried out with careful focus, the following crystallized:

- Culture
- Technology
- Quality
- Loss of control
- Options
- Participation
- New energy (bubbles)
- Encounters
- And more generally: hopelessness – polarization – rebellion

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post members were working with the information resulting from Parts One and Two, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world, their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.

Some of the specified themes are given special attention in the work of analysis and theoretical understanding, namely, loss of control, options, participation and new energy.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Loss of control

Analysis: Developments in the field of technology, not least communication technology, provide the opportunity for distributing information in a way, and with a speed, that has not been possible in mankind's history.

It is possible to use information technology to ruin the lives of individuals but also to make rebellion for a better life.

As information via social media can be either true or false, can be used with constructive or destructive aims, the phenomenon is both good and bad. Questions such as 'Who is in charge of it all?' and 'Where is it heading?' arise.

Hypothesis: The enormously rapid pace of change in the field of technology leads to an experience of loss of control and this in turn spawns anxiety and insecurity in the individual human being. However, the feeling of hope seems to predominate, and gives rise to a new energy and the birth of new initiatives.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Options

Analysis: The political direction in Sweden and many other Western countries emphasizes the importance of offering the individual options in various areas and autonomy in their own life and their life choices.

At the same time it has been established that there is a growing gulf between 'the haves and the have-nots'.

Hypothesis: The number of possible choices can feel overwhelming and lead to the experience that options are actually illusory. To be 'forced' to actively choose between many alternatives can also be experienced as demanding, and can lead to feelings of powerlessness and passivity, or to one refraining from choosing, and this as an expression of protest against demands.

The observation that the gulfs in society are increasing leads to feelings of rage and powerlessness and even despair.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Participation

Analysis: It is noted that there is a current of new individual and locally centred initiatives in areas such as schools, private enterprise, environment, charity etc.

Hypothesis: Even if there are examples of 'local irresponsibility' there is more of the opposite. The feeling that 'society at large is too large' and that 'I cannot get the better of the macro society' seems to engender the wish to participate in 'a bite size' area. This can also be regarded as an expression of the wish, the demand, to regain an active citizenship in general.

Analysis and Hypothesis 4

New energy

Analysis: This is connected to a certain extent with the phenomenon Participation.

There appear to be more and more enthusiasts starting up various things. There is a great deal of activity supporting integration in society. The old saying of 'being given a job' is now replaced by the more active 'getting a job'.

Hypothesis: The feeling that there is more scope for initiative and the freedom to take it engenders hope and releases new energy.

General Conclusion

The sequence of hopelessness – polarisation – rebellion (or new initiatives) perhaps describes a process in which Swedish society and individual citizens find themselves. All sectors of society or individuals do not find themselves in the same phase simultaneously, but it is perhaps possible to describe a general situation with these three terms.

In a society where there is splitting, complexity and fragmentation there can arise the wish for, and seeking after, a comprehensive power and capacity. This can lead to the formation of new roles, where the emphasis is put specifically on the collecting/keeping together function. The group wanted this force to be endowed with wisdom.

Participants who had been to previous Listening Posts were of the opinion that this year's LP was characterised by more hope than earlier.

Conveners: Hasse Kjellgren and Stina Åsell